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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8079
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0445
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0366
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0426
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RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0489
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0871

UNCLAS NOUAKCHOTT 000102

SIPDIS

PASS TO: AF/W BOULWARE/HEFLIN; PARIS/KANEDA

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [MR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: "TIME TO TALK TO AL QAEDA?" ARTICLE

11. (U) Summary: Local English language monthly, Peace, ran an item on January 18 entitled "Time to Talk to Al Qaeda?" by Junta Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou. The article posits that Al Qaeda grievances are legitimate and invites the US to acknowledge them: "September 11 was not an unprovoked, gratuitous act... Al Qaeda believes that the citizens of the states with whom it is at war bear a responsibility for the policies of their government... Though dismissed widely, the best strategy for the United States may well be to acknowledge and address the collective reasons in which Al Qaeda anchors its acts of force." "Time to Talk to Al Qaeda?" is a reprint of a September 14, 2005 op-ed in the Boston Globe authored by Mohamedou when he was Associate Director for the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University. That column received critical reviews in the US when published. This article's publication following strong anti-Israel demonstrations highlights to an extremely narrow readership local dissatisfaction with US Middle Eastern policy. It may also be a very tightly focused signal to us that the regime believes it has alternatives in its search for legitimacy. End summary.

12. (U) Mohamedou, an academic who spent almost 15 years in the US, four of them at Harvard, is a foreign relations specialist who served as Ambassador and Director of Multilateral Cooperation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Abdallahi government. He was appointed Foreign Affairs Minister following his support of the August 6 coup. According to political section Locally Employed Staff, Mohamedou, a member of Ouled Bisbaa (General Aziz's tribe) by birth, grew up in Atar close to the Smasside tribe but has recently "rediscovered" his Ouled Bisbaa origins. Mohamedou's father, Mohamedou Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, is president of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture. Mission has maintained open and cordial relations with Mohamedou. A widely published author, Mohamedou has focused on Al Qaeda and post September 11 US - Middle East relations.

13. (SBU) Comment: Given the recent visit of the Iranian Vice President and downward spiral of Mauritanian-Israeli relations, there are some who believe Mohamedou is fashioning a more collaborative policy with the "east", i.e., Iran, Syria, and Libya. Some, including the Israeli Ambassador, are disturbed by the Al Qaeda article. If the piece were reprinted with Mohamedou's permission or at his direction, it

is a direct signal to the US that the Junta has other options. Who else reads the English language press in Nouakchott? It is doubtful that Mohamedou would have agreed to its publication, if he were asked, without authorization from so-called head of state Aziz. Then again, it may be an attempt by the editors to curry favor with the Minister and fill space with a product in keeping with the surge of Palestinian support at Gaza's wake. Over the coming week we shall endeavor to ask the editor and others without muddying the waters. End Comment.

WALSH